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Promoting and protecting the health of the public and the environment

The S.C. Department of Health and Environmental Control has announced that an air quality permit for the proposed Santee Cooper project in Florence County has been issued.

The South Carolina Pollution Control Act is clear that DHEC must issue an air permit if an application meets all currently applicable regulations and standards.

Among the permit requirements, DHEC is imposing a limit on the amount of mercury that can be discharged into the atmosphere of no more than 46.3 lb/year per unit. Santee Cooper had proposed to emit no more than 57 lb/year per unit of mercury.

Santee Cooper has changed its particulate control device design from an electrostatic precipitator to a fabric filter baghouse to reduce mercury emissions to meet the permitted limits. The controls proposed by Santee Cooper should reduce mercury emissions by 90 to 95 percent.

A permit condition has been placed in the permit requiring Santee Cooper to meet the most stringent limit for mercury whether it is the state's permitted limit or the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency's future standard.

A permit condition has been placed in the permit requiring Santee Cooper to leave room in its facility design for additional mercury controls if required by future regulations.

Santee Cooper has entered into a Memorandum of Agreement with DHEC and other state utilities to participate in a mercury study specific to South Carolina, involving existing facilities. A permit condition for the Pee Dee project also requires Santee Cooper to install an ambient mercury monitor near the proposed plant. The data from this study will be used by DHEC to assist with a statewide mercury risk reduction strategy.

The agency will conduct a mercury health study. This health study is not linked to this permit but is being conducted to address community concerns of current mercury exposure. The scope of this health study is still being established.

Santee Cooper will conduct a six-month trial study of injecting a sorbent into the emissions before being released to determine if any additional reductions in the amount of mercury released to the atmosphere can be achieved. The sorbent, consisting of solid particles, would bind with the mercury, which will then be captured and removed before being released into the atmosphere. Santee Cooper will submit a testing plan for DHEC's approval before beginning the trial. A report on the effectiveness and cost will be submitted to DHEC once the study is finished.

The permit provides DHEC's Bureau of Air Quality the right to reopen the permit to incorporate any new state or federal carbon dioxide or greenhouse gas requirements in the future. The permit also provides DHEC's Bureau of Air Quality the right to reopen the permit to incorporate any revised conditions to help prevent the area from being deemed non-attainment for particulate matter or ozone.

DHEC maintains an extensive webpage for this project with permit decisions, applications, correspondence, comments and the responses to comments posted to www.scdhec.gov/santeecooper

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